

PRESENTS



Christopher Taylor, piano

A Tour de Force: Piano Series Event

Saturday, December 6, 2008 • 8 pm

Sunday, December 7, 2008 • 2 pm

Studio Theatre, Mondavi Center, UC Davis

There will be one intermission.

Post-performance Q&As

December 6 Moderator: Jeremy Ganter, Associate Executive Director
and Director of Programming, Mondavi Center, UC Davis

December 7 Moderator: Don Roth, Executive Director, Mondavi Center, UC Davis

The artists and your fellow audience members appreciate silence during the performance. Please be sure that you have switched off cellular phones, watch alarms, and pager signals. Videotaping, photographing, and audio recording are strictly forbidden. Violators are subject to removal.

PROGRAM

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus

Olivier Messiaen

(*“Twenty Glances Upon the Infant Jesus”*)

1. Regard du Père (“Glance of the Father”) *Extremement lent. Mystérieux, avec l’amour*
2. Regard de l'étoile (“Glance of the Star”) *Moderé*
3. L'échange (“The Interchange”) *Bien moderé*
4. Regard de la Vierge (“Glance of the Virgin”) *Bien moderé*
5. Regard du Fils sur le Fils (“Glance of the Son upon Himself”) *Tres lent*
6. Par Lui tout a été fait (“By Him were all things made”) *Moderé, presque vif*
7. Regard de la Croix (“Glance of the Cross”) *Bien modere*
8. Regard des hauteurs (“Glance of the Heights”) *Vif*
9. Regard du Temps (“Glance of Time”) *Moderé*
10. Regard de l'Esprit de Joie (“Glance of the Spirit of Joy”) *Presque vif*

Intermission

11. Première Communion de la Vierge (“First Communion of the Virgin”) *Tres lent*
12. La parole toute puissante (“The almighty Word”) *Un peu vif*
13. Noël (“Christmas”) *Tres vif, joyeux*
14. Regard des Anges (“Glance of the Angels”) *Tres vif*
15. Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus (“The Kiss of the Infant Jesus”) *Tres lent; calme*
16. Regard des Prophètes, des Berges et des Mages
 (“Glance of the Prophets, the Shepherds and the Magi”) *Moderé*
17. Regard du silence (“Glance of Silence”) *Tres Moderé*
18. Regard de l'Onction terrible (“Glance of the awesome Sacrament”) *Moderé*
19. Je dors, mais mon coeur veille (“I sleep, but my heart keeps watch”) *Lent*
20. Regard de l'Eglise d'amour (“Glance of the Church of Love”) *Presque vif*

Christopher Taylor is represented by Jonathan Wentworth Associates, Ltd., Mt. Vernon, NY
www.jwentworth.com

PROGRAM NOTES

by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus

Olivier Messiaen

(Born December 10, 1908, in Avignon, France; died April 28, 1992, in Paris)

Olivier Messiaen, France's foremost composer during the decades after Debussy's death in 1918, summarized the three main influences on his life and work: "The foremost idea I wanted to express in music is the existence of the truths of the Catholic faith. A number of my works are therefore intended to illuminate the theological truths of the Catholic belief...But I am a human being, and like all human beings I am sensitive to human love, which I have tried to express in my works...And finally, I admire Nature profoundly. I think that Nature surpasses us infinitely, and I have always sought to draw lessons from it; by choice I have loved birds and so I've investigated birdsong in particular; I have studied ornithology. There is, in my music, this juxtaposition of the Catholic faith, of [the expression of human] love, and the extremely developed use of birdsong." Among the major documents of Messiaen's artistic creed is the 1944 cycle of piano pieces inspired by the nativity of Christ, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* ("Twenty Glances Upon the Infant Jesus").

Messiaen provided the following titles, subtitles, and comments on the movements of his *Vingt Regards*:

1. *Regard du Père* ("Glance of the Father"). Complete statement of the *Theme of God*. And God said: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."
2. *Regard de l'étoile* ("Glance of the Star"). Theme of the *Star and the Cross*. The shock of grace...the star shines simply, surmounted by a cross.
3. *L'échange* ("The Interchange"). Descent as a shooting star, ascent in a spiral; the mighty intercourse between humanity and the divine. God makes Himself man that He may make us gods. God is represented by material in alternating thirds: this material does not change, but remains very small. Mankind is shown by fragments that grow and grow until they become enormous, according to a developmental procedure I call "asymmetrical enlargement."
4. *Regard de la Vierge* ("Glance of the Virgin"). Innocence and tenderness...the woman of purity, the woman of the Magnificat: the Virgin contemplates her child.
5. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* ("Glance of the Son upon Himself": A mystery, a ray of light in the night—a refraction of Joy, the birds of silence—the incarnation of the Word—the joining of human and divine natures in Jesus Christ.) This concerns the contemplation of the Son-as-Christ-child by the Son-as-Word-of-God. Three sonorities, three modes, three rhythms, three strands of music superimposed: the Theme of God and a two-part canon by augmentation. Joy is symbolized by birdsong.
6. *Par Lui tout a été fait* ("By Him were all things made": The abundance of space and time: galaxies, photons, opposed spirals, inverted lightning; by "Him" [the Word] were all things made. In an instant, all creation reveals to us the luminous shadow of His voice.) This is a fugue. The subject is never presented the same way twice. The middle section is based on very short and very long durations (as if infinitely small or infinitely large). The return of the fugue in retrograde. A mysterious stretto. The Theme of God, fortissimo: a victorious presence, the face of God behind the flame and the flood. All creation takes up the Theme of God again and sings it in a canon of chords.
7. *Regard de la Croix* ("Glance of the Cross": *The Cross says to Him: "You will be a priest in my arms."*) Theme of the *Star and the Cross*, which signifies the symbols at the beginning and end of Christ's earthly life.
8. *Regard des hauteurs* ("Glance of the heights"). Glory in the highest...the skies descend to the manger as the song of the lark. Birdsong: nightingale, blackbird, warblers, chaffinch, goldfinch, canary, and above all the lark.
9. *Regard du Temps* ("Glance of Time"). Mystery of the fullness of time. Time sees in itself the birth of He who is eternal...The theme is short, cold, strange...a rhythmic canon.
10. *Regard de l'Esprit de Joie* ("Glance of the Spirit of Joy": A passionate dance, the rapturous sound of horns, transported by the Holy Spirit—the joy of God's blessed love in the soul of Jesus Christ.) An oriental dance [based on the *Haec Dies*, the plainchant for the Gradual of Easter Sunday] in the extreme bass register, in unequal groups of notes like plainsong; a first development section based on the Theme of Joy; an asymmetrical expansion; a kind of hunting-song in three variations; a second development section based on the Theme of Joy and the Theme of God; a return of the oriental dance, extremely high and extremely low together; a coda on the Theme of Joy.
11. *Première Communion de la Vierge* ("First Communion of the Virgin": *After the Annunciation, Mary in adoration of Jesus within her—my God, my son, my Magnificat!—my love untroubled by the sound of words.*) A picture of the Virgin on her knees, at night, in contemplation of Her own body—a halo of light hanging over Her womb. The Theme of God, in delicate spirals, in stalactites, in an internal embrace. A recollection of the theme of *La Vierge et l'Enfant* from my *La Nativité du Seigneur* [1935]. An ecstatic Magnificat. Distinctive chords...beneath which deep pulsations represent the heartbeats of the Child in His Mother's womb. The Theme of God dissolves into silence.
12. *La parole toute puissante* ("The almighty Word": *This child is the Word which affirms all things by the power of His speech.*) A monody with deep percussion.
13. *Noël*. (*The Christmas bells celebrate the sweet names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.*) A carillon.
14. *Regard des Anges* ("Glance of the Angels": *Flashing, crashing; mighty winds sounding through colossal trombones; Thy servants are as tongues of flame!—then the songs of the birds that dwell in the heavens—and the wonder of the angels mounts: for it is not with them but with the human race that God has united Himself.*) In the first three strophes: scintillation, a rhythmic canon, and a fragmentation of the Theme of Chords. Fourth strophe: birdsong; fifth strophe: the mounting wonder of the angels.

15. *Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus* ("The Kiss of the Infant Jesus": At each communion, the Christ-child sleeps with us near the gates of Heaven; then opens them to the garden of creation and hastens in all His radiance to embrace us.) The Theme of God as a lullaby. The sunshine—the garden—the arms outstretched towards love—the kiss—the shadow of the kiss. I was inspired by an engraving which shows the Christ-child leaving His Mother's arms to embrace St. Thérèse of Lisieux. This is a symbol of the communion, of divine love.

16. *Regard des Prophètes, des Berges et des Mages* ("Glance of the Prophets, the Shepherds and the Magi": Gongs and oboes—a vast and reedy consort.) An exotic music.

17. *Regard du silence* ("Glance of Silence"). An inner silence, an inverted rainbow...each quiet moment in the manger reveals the music and colors which are the mystery of Jesus Christ. At the end, alternating chords: the music is multicolored and inscrutable, like confetti, like precious stones, like mingling reflections.

18. *Regard de l'Onction terrible* ("Glance of the awesome Sacrament": The Word assumes a truly human nature; the fearful Majesty selects the body of Jesus.) An ancient tapestry depicts the Word of God in combat through the figure of Christ on horseback: we see only His hands on the hilt of a sword which He brandishes amidst thunderbolts. In the introduction and coda, progressively longer notes are heard above progressively shorter ones and vice versa.

19. *Je dors, mais mon coeur veille* ("I sleep, but my heart keeps watch"). A love-poem, a dialogue of mystical love. It is the sleeping Jesus, who loves us in His day of rest and brings us forgiveness.

20. *Regard de l'Eglise d'amour* ("Glance of the Church of Love"). It is mercy that makes us love God as He loves Himself; after the shooting stars of deepest night and the spirals of suffering, here are bells, glory and the kiss of love...all our passion as we embrace the invisible. In the form of this piece, the development precedes the exposition. Development: the first theme in non-retrogradable rhythm, expanding at its beginning and end, divided by sparkling figurations. Three statements of the *Theme of God* separated by asymmetrical enlargements. A third theme is developed [the *Theme of Love*]. The first theme again with its sparkling figures, then a new enlargement. Finally, the ringing of bells. Exposition: a complete statement of the *Theme of God*, as a glorious fanfare. A long coda on the *Theme of God*—the triumph of love and joy, tears of joy.

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CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR, PIANO

Among his generation of pianists, Christopher Taylor stands out as an innovative musician with a diverse array of talents and interests. During the past few years, he has appeared regularly in many important concert halls and developed a loyal following throughout the United States and abroad; critics hail him as "one of the most impressive young pianists on the horizon today" (*The Washington Post*) and "frighteningly talented" (*The New York Times*). He is known for a passionate advocacy of music written in the past 100 years—Messiaen, Ligeti, and Bolcom figure prominently in his performances—but his repertoire spans four centuries and includes the complete Beethoven sonatas, the Liszt *Transcendental Etudes*, Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, and a multitude of other familiar masterworks. Whatever the genre or era of the composition, Taylor brings to it an active imagination and intellect coupled with heartfelt intensity and grace.

In recent seasons Taylor has concertized around the globe, performing throughout Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean. At home in the U.S. he has appeared with such orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Colorado Symphony, Detroit Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Houston Symphony, and Boston Pops, and has toured with the Polish Chamber Philharmonic. As a soloist he has performed in New York's Carnegie and Alice Tully Halls, Washington's Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Ravinia and Aspen festivals, and dozens of other venues. In chamber settings, he has collaborated with many eminent musicians, including Robert McDuffie, Robert Mann, and the Borromeo, Shanghai, Pro Arte, and Ying quartets. His recordings have featured works by Liszt, Messiaen, and present-day Americans William Bolcom and Derek Bermel. Apart from concertizing and recording, he has undertaken various unusual projects. Recent examples include the commission and premiere of a piano concerto by Derek Bermel with the Indianapolis Symphony, made possible by a Christel Award from the American Pianists' Association; investigations into the compositions of the legendary pianist Gunnar Johansen; performances and lectures on the complete etudes of György Ligeti; and a series of performances of the *Goldberg Variations* on the unique double-manual Steinway piano in the collection of the University of Wisconsin, an instrument whose rediscovery and refurbishment he has actively promoted.

Numerous awards have confirmed Taylor's high standing in the musical world. He was named an American Pianists' Association Fellow for 2000. He had earlier received an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1996 and the Bronze Medal in the 1993 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, where he was the first American to receive such high recognition in 12 years. In 1990, he took first prize in the William Kapell International Piano Competition and also became one of the first recipients of the Irving Gilmore Young Artists' Award.

Christopher Taylor owes much of his success to several outstanding teachers, including Russell Sherman, Maria Curcio-Diamand, Francisco Aybar, and Julie Bees. In addition to his busy concert schedule, he currently serves as Paul Collins Associate Professor of Piano Performance at the University of Wisconsin. He pursues a variety of other interests, including mathematics (he received a *summa cum laude* degree from Harvard in this field in 1992); philosophy (an article he co-authored with leading scholar Daniel Dennett appears in the *Oxford Free Will Handbook*); computing (he created a compiler for a new programming language); and biking, which is his primary means of commuting. Taylor lives in Middleton, Wisconsin, with his wife and two daughters.